DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 467 EA 013 926

AUTHOR Ivey, Saundra
TITLE Education and the Voter: School Spending at the Polls. The Ford Fellows in Educational Journalism Report.
INSTITUTION George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Inst. for Educational Leadership.
SPONS AGENCY Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Jan 79
NOTE 52p.: Not available in paper copy due to marginal legibility of original document.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Conflict; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; Property Taxes; *Public Opinion; *School Budget Elections; School Taxes; Voting
IDENTIFIERS Tax Limitations

ABSTRACT

During the late 1960s and early 1970s a tax revolt occurred that affected school budgets in states in which citizens vote on school taxes and budgets. While the revolt was started by persons opposed to any tax increases, it was helped by those who felt that reduced enrollments should mean lower school costs and by those who felt that only persons with children in school should pay for the schools. Another major contribution to tax election defeats was controversy over the schools, including controversy over desegregation, sex education, or administrators' leadership styles. Groups supporting and groups opposing school tax issues are both becoming more sophisticated in their attempts to influence elections. Both groups are targeting precincts and raising money to mount campaigns. Opinions are mixed over the results of budget cuts caused by the tax revolt. Many worry about the effects of reducing class offerings, increasing class sizes, and postponing needed building maintenance. Others argue that the budget cuts have allowed schools to get rid of weak programs and to get back to the basics. Budget defeats exacerbate the fiscal inequalities between districts that have been the focus of recent litigation. State aid programs to ease those disparities, however, cause worry about a loss of local control over the schools. (Author/IBT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED208467

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

The Ford Fellows In Educational Journalism Report:

EDUCATION AND THE VOTER: SCHOOL SPENDING AT THE POLLS

By Saundra Ivey
Education Writer
The Tennessean
Nashville, Tennessee

EA 013 926

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Brundage
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Ford Fellows in Educational Journalism
is a program of The George Washington University's
Institute for Educational Leadership.

EDUCATION AND THE VOTER:
SCHOOL SPENDING AT THE POLLS

by Saundra Ivey
Education Writer
The Tennessean

and

Ford Foundation Fellow
in Educational Journalism,
1978

January 1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks for the opportunity to conduct this study go to the Ford Foundation, the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the Tennessean. Thanks are due, as well, to the many parents, students, educators and public officials who graciously interrupted busy schedules to talk at length with a reporter they had never heard of.

Views expressed in this paper are those of the author or the individuals quoted and do not represent positions of the Ford Foundation, the Institute for Educational Leadership, or the Tennessean.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent positions of The Ford Foundation or the Institute for Educational Leadership

I

THE PROBLEM

> . . . a surprisingly large number of persons volunteered the comment that people with children in the schools should pay a special tax and that the elderly and those without children in the schools should not have to pay any tax to support the public schools.
>
> The 10th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 1978

If there's one thing educators across the country agree on, it's that the days when they asked for more money and the taxpayers' only question was "How much?" are gone.

What they're not so sure about is why.

"It's like trying to figure out why two people got a divorce," said administrator James R. Rowlands as he tried to explain why voters in his Federal Way, Washington, district have turned down twenty-one consecutive school levies.

"There are so many reasons it's hard to separate them."

Rowlands' frustration is shared by his colleagues across the nation as they try to determine whether there is a rebellion against taxes or against public education.

Many administrators would prefer the first explanation, and some defensively argue that only a pocketbook issue is involved when, for example, a record 222 school districts in New York experienced budget defeats in 1978. And in a period of skyrocketing inflation, it would be foolish to argue that money is not involved when a taxpayer says no to school spending.

"The tax thing is for real," said Donald Swanson, a principal in Federal Way. "My property tax bill was more than $800 a year until the school levy was voted down, and the next year it was only $385. I can almost understand the motivation of people who pull the no lever."

That motivation is even more understandable in light of an Educational Research Service report on studies indicating that voters consider the property tax -- the most common source of school funding -- the least fair tax.

In states which do not have circuit-breaker mechanisms or other laws to assist those on low and fixed incomes, property tax is a particularly devastating blow to senior citizens. Not surprisingly, researchers in several states have described negative voting patterns among the elderly in school tax elections.

In its 1977 publication, Voter Behavior and Campaign Strategies in School Finance Elections, the Educational Research Service observed that some citizens, such as parents

of school-age children and educators, derive substantial benefits from the costs of taxes supporting education.

Others, such as non-parents or senior citizens, face additional costs but do not receive obvious material benefits.

The latter group's attitudes may be reflected in the 1978 Gallup Poll finding that "a surprisingly large number of persons" expressed the belief that those without children in the public schools should not have to support them.

The growth of that sentiment, coupled with an aging U.S. population and a decline in birth rate that began in the early 1960's, could cause increasing reluctance to fund the schools.

It is decreased birth rate, in fact, that has caused a major sore spot in school funding -- the declining school enrollment that a recent National Institute of Education study termed "the challenge of the coming decade."

"The public has been taught that each additional child costs more to educate, so people think the opposite should be true," said Denis P. Doyle, chief of the institute's School Finance and Organization Division. "They get upset when the budget continues to grow as the number of students declines."

Although the NIE study indicates that enrollment drop cannot immediately be translated into dollar savings, the less pupils/more dollars controversy has assumed major proportions in some school budget elections.

A number of educators, particularly those in urban areas, said they believe demographic factors alone make it virtually impossible to win school tax approval. There are just not enough people with a direct interest in the schools to support additional spending in a period of tightening personal budgets, they say.

In some states that is less of a problem than others, since the degree of direct control over school budgets exercised by voters varies considerably. For example, in some communities, local governing bodies set the rate for taxes supporting education, and the voters' attitudes toward school budget exert pressure only indirectly, on their elected officials.

In twenty-two states, according to the Educational Research Service, voters must approve the tax levy for schools, and in five states, they must approve the school budget at annual elections. It is primarily in those states that the so-called tax revolt against schools has occurred.

That phenomenon did not, as some media accounts would have it, spring into existence with passage of California's Proposition 13 (a measure which, though it had considerable impact on school budgets, was designed not as an anti-education spending measure, but as a means of property tax relief).

According to the Educational Research Service, a National Education Finance Project study completed in 1972 concluded that the United States experienced "a genuine taxpayer revolt" during the late 1960's and early '70's -- a revolt the study predicted might dominate this decade.

Since that report, massive program cuts, teacher strikes, school closings and lawsuits have occurred in states where voters directly control education spending.

It is clear that the degree to which schools experience financial difficulty in those states is related to the regulations governing education tax elections and the extent to which their outcome is crucial to general operating expenses.

In New York, for example, though non-city districts must subject their budgets to annual voter approval, the fate of most districts whose budgets are rejected is far from dire. Under state law, those districts may levy whatever tax rate is necessary to fund a contingency budget which includes only items considered vital by the state.

Pupil-teacher ratio and salary negotiations are not regulated by the law, and the items which must be cut in contingency budgets, such as extracurricular activities and transportation, are for the most part sure vote-getters in the

line-item referendums districts may hold to add to the tax rate set without voter approval.[1]

In Ohio, no such provision exists, and laws which do not permit local education revenue to rise in proportion to increased property valuations require many school districts to seek new levies simply to keep pace with inflation.

In Washington, where levy defeats sparked the Seattle school board's lawsuit overturning the state's school finance system, it apparently was not just the existence of school tax elections but also the heavy reliance on them that finally caused voters to say no at the polls.

Between 1960 and 1975, the first year in which a large number of school taxes were defeated, requests for so-called "special levies," originally intended to fund enrichment programs, rose from $8.4 million to more than $299 million. Whereas the levies had accounted for only 4% of total education spending in 1960, they accounted for 30% of spending by 1975.

---

[1]Most New York districts which depend on voters are better off than not only their counterparts in states such as Ohio, but also than their large-city cousins within the state. Julius E. Deuble, executive deputy superintendent for administrative services in the City of Syracuse's school district, said municipal overburden means his district "is more financially pressed than those who go to the voters -- so much so that we were a party to the Levittown school finance case." In fact, Deuble said, "Several years ago, we asked for the opportunity of going on a contingency budget, because it might have exceeded where we are now."

"The state began balancing its budget by under-funding education and using special levies as an out," said Patt Sutton, president of the Seattle school board. Maynard Mathison, director of school fiscal services for the state's education department, agreed, adding that by 1975, some districts which experienced failures were relying on the "special levies" for up to 43% of their general funds.

As a result of the Seattle board's successful suit, Washington's school finance system has been revised, and districts are limited to using levies only for special purposes. Ironically, some educators who criticized reliance on levies before the Seattle suit are now seeking to lift the state's "levy lid" so they can raise more money for special programs.

But in most states where education spending is heavily reliant on voters, problems continue to occur, prompting a growing number of scholarly studies on why citizens vote no on school taxes.

For political scientists, such studies are part of a wider attempt to understand voter behavior. For educators, the studies are part of what some term a battle for financial survival.

II

THE ROLE OF CONFLICT

Combining the demographic factors of declining birth rate and aging population with the economic realities of inflation and rising taxes suggests that school funding would face tough battles even in the best of times. When community conflict over what the schools are doing arises, passing a school tax becomes virtually impossible.

"If defeat in a school spending election were only an economic issue, a lot more schools would be running out of funds," said Philip K. Piele, director of the Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Educational Management.

Where the financial support breaks down is where there is conflict in the community about what the schools should be doing. Sex education is one of the most striking examples of such conflict, and it was cited by several Washington educators as a major factor in the defeats of their school taxes.

"When our former superintendent proposed a comprehensive health program that would include human sexuality, it just blew up and split the district," said Jack Thompson, director of secondary education for the Renton school system.

"In 1970, we were on '60 Minutes' because of the controversy. It really contributed to our problems passing levies."

Those problems became so severe that in 1971, the district's newly constructed Lindbergh High School could not be opened because of levy failures. "It sat boarded up for a year, and then the next year the levy passed and the school was opened," Thompson said, adding that a "more open system" of school administration appears to have solved the district's problems with levy failures.

In Ohio, another state where school budgets are heavily dependent on voter approval, controversy surrounding desegregation is cited as a major reason for school tax defeats. In Dayton, school officials explained almost triumphantly that you "can't pass a levy in a city with court-ordered desegregation" (an assertion belied by the example of Detroit), appearing to enjoy being able to cite what they termed a "vote against the judge" in their anti-desegregation arguments.

There can be no doubt, however, that many Ohio voters equate their no's on school spending with rebellion against court orders they oppose.

Even in Cleveland, where reports questioning the school system's past financial practices, and the October arrest of the city's 27-year-old school board president for exposing his

buttocks in an interstate highway "mooning" incident might be expected to raise questions of accountability, the majority of white voters approached in random election-day interviews cited desegregation as their major complaint concerning the schools.

"Are you kidding?" a Cleveland taxi driver replied when asked if he would support the $11.1 million school tax on the November 7 ballot. "To pay for buses?"

"It's definitely going to lose," predicted Vincent Fagen as he finished voting in Cleveland's 22nd Ward. "The money is secondary [in determining voter choices]. The concern over the ruling by the judge [U.S. District Court Judge Frank J. Battisti, who presides over the city's school desegregation case] is first." Whether or not Fagen was correct in analyzing reasons for the vote, the financially strapped school system's levy was defeated for the third time in 1978.

In Dayton, where the school system's fourth levy attempt in two years was also defeated November 7, teachers' union president Roberta Hunter said, "Because we're one of those states that goes to the electorate for approval of school taxes, if you're upset about anything -- taxes, test scores or busing -- you can just say no at the polls."

And in many communities, voters seem to find plenty to upset them in the way their schools are run.

In Tennessee, Obion County schools were closed for ten days last October after state funds were cut off because voters had rejected a $13 million bond issue designed to bring county schools up to minimum standards. The 2-to-1 negative vote was interpreted as much as an anti-consolidation message as a financial one, since the measure -- recently approved by the County Commission, which had authority to issue bonds regardless of the referendum's outcome -- involved replacing nine schools with only six new ones.

The political time bomb such as issue can become is illustrated in Cottage Grove, Oregon's, South Lane school district, which was closed for more than a month in 1976 after voters defeated four budget levies.

"The consolidation was twelve years ago, but that memory lingers on, and whenever any controversy about the schools comes up, we get the town-county split," said school board member Kamy Walter.

However, there were other conflicts in Cottage Grove, including charges of "too many frills" and poor communication, which led the board to buy up the final years of its superintendent's contract. The action followed an outside consultant's evaluation that the district could no longer progress under that administrator, though he had not received an unfavorable evaluation during eleven years in the position. Similar conflicts over the personality or methods

of a superintendent were reported in several other districts which had experienced school tax defeats.

In other communities, the number of administrators and their salaries have become volatile issues. "We have the highest-paid superintendent in the county, and he's paid more than some city officials," said Bernard Durkin, school board president in the North Syracuse, N.Y., school district, which experienced two budget defeats in 1978. The superintendent of the 12,109-pupil district is paid $47,000, "and that's a major bone of contention," Durkin said.

In Nashville, former Finance Director Kenneth Schoen grabbed headlines and a great deal of favorable response from taxpayers last summer when he repeatedly charged that 154 employees of the school system, including Schools Director Elbert Brooks, "make more than the mayor."

Schoen was one-upped, however, in Elgin, Ill., where semi-retired attorney Eugene T. Devitt formed the Elgin Area Taxpayers Watchdog Committee to help defeat a school tax referendum in May 1978. Devitt charged that Elgin's superintendent "makes more than the governor," an assertion which ignores the fringe benefits the state's chief executive receives.

However, despite the criticism of administrative salaries, Devitt said his taxpayer group "only has one target now, and that's the teachers." Referring to the powerful

Elgin Teachers Association, which has gone on strike four times since 1971, Devitt said, "Teachers have lost their professionalism. All they give a damn about is getting a raise."

Even the school district's superintendent, Paul R. Lawrence, said the perception of "militancy of teachers" probably contributed to the referendum's defeat.

In several other communities which experienced school tax problems, bitterness remaining from teachers' strikes was cited as a reason for negative voting on school issues.

It would be a mistake to assert cause-and-effect relationships among events which simply follow each other in time, but it appears more than a coincidence that districts which experience problems with school tax approvals have so frequently been rent with conflicts about education and its role in the community.

And no matter how long the conflicts have been buried, they are generally aired in full at school tax election time.

III

THE SCHOOL TAX ELECTION

Despite the articles which frequently appear in educators' publications indicating that pancake suppers and bake sales are the way to win support for school tax elections, districts under serious financial pressure have developed far more sophisticated techniques -- methods similar to those used in campaigns for public office.

Campaign spending can be heavy when financial issues affecting education are on the ballot. For example, Michigan Education Association officials reported spending about $600,000 on a campaign against three such measures on the state's November 1978 ballot.

That expenditure, which included $50,000 from MEA's parent National Education Association, was necessary because "voters needed a tremendous amount of education," said Warren Culver, the group's associate director for public affairs.

Even single-community campaigns can involve fairly heavy spending, as when a Toledo, Ohio, coalition raised $70,000 for a levy promotion in a single week. Freeman A. Flynn, director of the Detroit school system's Division of School-Community Relations, said that system's staff has contributed more than $175,000 to five school tax campaigns over the last two years.

For the most part, money raised is spent on media efforts which include flyers, bumper stickers, buttons and paid newspaper, television and radio advertisements. At times, such advertising can backfire, as in the case of a Dayton, Ohio, radio commercial which so offended an Appalachian group that it was withdrawn in less than one day.

The ad, part of a well-financed effort coordinated by a veteran of several political campaigns, was designed to dispel the image that Appalachian residents of Dayton, who had often opposed school taxes, voted as an unthinking block. But its use of a twangy-voiced actor who read such lines as "I'm voting for it because a better education is what'll get my young'uns better than I got" backfired.

Other advertisements, featuring endorsements from popular athletes, political figures or labor leaders, have been received more favorably among groups targeted by the pro- and anti-school spending forces.

Hugh M. Clark, whose Decision Research Corporation has conducted voter analysis for the Columbus, Ohio, school system, urges that 5 to 10% of any campaign budget be spent on "early, systematic research." He said a frequent stumbling block in school tax elections is that "educators assume the public shares their priorities -- that the voters care whether flute is taught or not." Only research can show whether such

assumptions are valid, and thus, whether they can be effectively used to get out the pro-school vote, Clark said.

"When doing a levy campaign, I'm not as concerned with whether the levy's behind or ahead as with who's supporting it," Clark said. "Time and time again there are informal coalitions for and against it. If you find women are more pro-levy, your media should be in the daytime. If it's young voters, you make an effort to get the high school seniors out. We've found the pro-tax coalition here composed of blacks, younger people, the more educated and apartment dwellers, and those are the voters we try to bring out."

Clark said his firm relies not only on surveys, but also on analysis of past voting patterns in various precincts. "You can determine the pro-levy precincts and make sure you get out the vote there, or find precincts that have changed voting pattern and go door to door," he said.

"We've tried to put our targeting information in a form most usable by persons who haven't been involved in campaigns a lot." Thus Clark targets precincts as A (pro-levy, where efforts are made to bring out all voters), B (less pro-levy but amenable to change, where information can profitably be disseminated), and C (against the levy, where workers are told to make no efforts at all).

Like other levy consultants, Clark reported difficulty in convincing school supporters to ignore potential negative

voters, since hope apparently springs eternal among pro-school citizens that all they need to do is talk long enough to convince others of their cause.

A similar problem is apparently found among anti-tax forces, since The Taxpayer's Guide to Effective Tax Revolt warns the prospective tax slasher not to "delude yourself into believing that everybody wants to see spending limitations, tax cuts or balanced budgets." Attempting to change the votes of such "weirdos" will be a waste of time, the book concludes.

While some school systems still rely on the "how-we-did-it" accounts of far-away communities' successful school tax campaigns, more and more are employing the techniques Clark advocates. Administrators have become increasingly attuned to election analysis, which shows, among other things, that in a majority of school finance elections:

- The larger the turnout, the smaller the percentage of votes favorable to the schools. "Philip K. Piele, director of the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse on Educational Management, said this relationship is diminishing, with the schools sometimes going down to defeat in elections with small turnout.

  However, Piele said a high turnout is still a bad sign for the schools in most cases, since it frequently results from community conflicts

which draw negative voters who ordinarily stay at home.[1]

- Younger people are more likely than older citizens to vote in favor of the schools.
- Blacks are more likely than whites to vote in favor of a school financial proposal. It should be noted, however, that in several Ohio districts which have waged long court battles against desegregation, black support has diminished, and some voters have specifically indicated they will not support boards who use their tax money to "fight the NAACP in court."
- The higher a voter's educational level, the more likely it is that he or she will support a school tax.
- A voter who has favorable attitudes toward the schools or education in general is more likely to vote in favor of a school tax than is a voter with negative attitudes.
- In past years, voters with children enrolled in the public schools were more likely than those

---

[1]While Piele's comments are in line with the bulk of research literature, Hugh Clark indicated that in Columbus, "The best chance is in high-turnout elections." These conflicting opinions are only one illustration of why it may not be helpful for school systems to rely on other communities' experiences in planning their own elections.

without children in school to support education taxes, but Fiele said this is no longer the case.

Both pro- and anti-school spending forces, aware of these generalizations, typically conduct pre-election voter registration drives and election day get-out-the-vote campaigns among citizens considered most likely to favor their respective causes.

As the school tax campaign proceeds, it becomes more and more like a political contest, with debates, rallies and heated exchanges of letters to the editor in local newspaper columns. Any school conflict within memory -- desegregation, declining test scores, school closings and educators' salaries are among the most typical examples -- is likely to be aired during such exchanges.

Pro-school forces may conduct parades, as when several hundred North Syracuse, N.Y., students, led by cheerleaders and a high school band, marched through their community last August in support of a tax referendum on restoring extracurricular activities cut because of two budget election defeats.

Anti-school forces may also conduct rallies, and The Taxpayer's Guide to Effective Tax Revolt advises would-be budget-cutters to "stage media events" such as "a symbolic burning of forms for the target tax."

When it is all over, there are usually election-night gatherings at campaign headquarters, where precinct returns are scanned as avidly as they would be by any candidate for office.

If the final tally is good news for school forces, there are the same delighted screams that would be found among a victorious candidate's supporters. If it is bad news, the process of budget cutting begins.

IV

WHEN VOTERS SAY NO

The school district in Federal Way, Washington, where voters have rejected twenty-one consecutive school taxes in the last six years, is about as good an example as can be found of what happens when spending critics have their way and the proverbial "fat" is cut from the school budget.

"We've gone from a six-period day to a five-period day in the secondary schools, and we dropped courses not critical to earning a living, like foreign language and upper-level math, science and English courses," said James R. Rowlands, the district's coordinator for administrative services.

"One of our science teachers told me this fall that a few years ago, every student could participate at a work station during lab experiments. Then they went to demonstration tables where a group of four to six students watched it being done. Today, he does it and the class watches."

College-bound students in Federal Way "get the credits needed for graduation, so they can get into college, but when they get there, they'll be maybe a year behind," Rowlands said. However, it is not just those students whose programs

have been affected by the refusal of Federal Way voters to approve school taxes.

"Two years ago we eliminated all elementary school librarians, all elementary art and music and the seventh-grade music program," Rowlands said. "We have one school nurse for 15,170 students, and we've increased pupil walking distance to two miles. We've gone several years without replacing textbooks, and some of them have 1969 copyrights."

At Brigadoon Elementary School, once a community and national showplace, Principal Donald Swanson said only a few science textbooks are available, and they offer students the prediction that, "One day, men may walk on the moon."

Because of program cuts resulting from the repeated no votes on school taxes, Federal Way's five junior high schools lost their state accreditation in 1977, one of its three high schools is on probationary accreditation, and two are on temporary accreditation. According to a State Office of Public Instruction report, the high schools would have lost their accreditation altogether had there not been a statewide freeze at existing levels last year.

Those are the obvious results of school tax revolt, Rowlands said, "but the insidious things are the invisible ones." For example, he said that since seniority was the most important criteria in layoffs, the district lost "all our young, bright teachers fresh off the campus with new ideas."

Some teachers who escaped the seniority crunch left voluntarily because of classroom conditions, he said, citing a foreign language teacher who left after she was required to teach German, French and Latin to three groups of students in a single class period.

Federal Way is an extreme case, but in many ways the district provides a typical illustration of the pattern of cuts that characterizes school districts from which voters withdraw their financial support.

Because 80 to 85% of the average school system's budget is tied up in personnel costs, "When all the dust settles, what really happens is that you cut people," said Jack Thompson, director of secondary education in Renton, Washington.

He and administrators across the country agreed that most systems faced with budget pressures attempt to cut personnel least directly involved in basic education. Thus, music, art and physical education specialists are frequently cut from elementary school staffs, as are librarians.

The central office administration is cut, and the number of nurses, counselors and psychologists is decreased. "A psychologist comes to our school once a month for six hours, and only two students can be tested in that time," said Columbus, Ohio, teacher Sharon Sims at a meeting held for discussion of that city's school spending priorities. "That

means that during nine months of school, only eighteen students can be tested.[4]

Class size is generally increased, as is the number of split-grade classes at the elementary level. Small-enrollment classes such as advanced math, science or foreign language are frequently deleted from the high school curriculum.

Eligibility distance for school bus riders is increased, and service programs such as driver training and adult education are either cut or maintained on a tuition basis.

Extracurricular activities are sometimes marked for deletion, but the resulting howls of protest from sports fans -- often accompanied by offers of community fund raising to support popular teams -- make such cuts less likely than others.

Decreases in the number of building workers cause deferred maintenance -- a practice administrators say will prove expensive in the long run because of the high cost of replacing structures that could have been repaired. Textbooks are replaced less frequently, and the amount spent on library books declines.

Programs mandated by state and federal law, such as special education, must be continued, and many administrators said privately they fear a backlash from the parents of so-called "normal" children who see standard educational

offerings diminished while expensive services to other students are untouched in periods of budget stress.

The most extreme cut a district can make in response to defeats at the polls is closing its schools -- an action that has created shock waves in the communities where it has occurred.

Two years after the Cottage Grove, Oregon, system was shut down for that reason, City Manager Phillip Kushlan said he was still being approached at national conferences by people who "see my name tag and say, 'Oh yeah, you're the city that closed your schools.'"

Some Cottage Grove citizens were so distressed by the closing, which caused some homeowners to leave the city and nearly 20% of the high school teaching staff to leave the system, that they formed a citizens' committee which continued functioning long after the successful budget election which permitted resumption of school. "Looking back now, I see it as a crisis that made the community cohesive," Kushlan said.

In Toledo, Ohio, where schools were closed in 1976 and 1977 after tax election defeats, "The people in this community decided there is just too much pride in the city to let this happen," said Joseph W. Rutherford, administrative assistant in the school system.

The declining property sales which followed negative national publicity caused Toledo's Board of Realtors to take

out full-page newspaper advertisements urging citizens to vote for the school tax increase to protect their own home values, said Edward Schulte, of the city's Chamber of Commerce.

"We stopped trying to sell people on the idea that schools were good for kids," Schulte said. "Essentially, we said, 'Get your head out of the sand or you'll lose money, because your property values will keep going down.'"

Many large businesses sent letters urging their workers to support the school tax and in a sense of "total emergency," the tax was passed in November of 1977, permitting schools to reopen, Schulte said.

School closing is such a dramatic symbol of financial problems that few can argue with the idea that something must be done to change it. In the case of budget cuts, however, there are those who do not share the automatic reaction of some educators that the word "cut" is negative.

For example, in Federal Way, Washington, principal Donald Swanson says that after twenty-one consecutive school tax election defeats, his district "is finally getting around to doing what the public wants."

"For a long time, I felt I was the educator and the public should do what I say," said Swanson as he described cuts in the district's budget. "Now I feel, and without bitterness, that we're finally doing what people wanted us to do all along."

As one example, Swanson pointed to the architecture of his Brigadoon Elementary School, which won a national award in 1971 for its innovative "open-classroom" design. However, he said parents objected to that design so strenuously that wooden partitions have since been erected within the formerly open rooms.

"When we cut kindergarten reading materials, we had complaints, but I got no complaints that kindergartners weren't singing," Swanson said. "Sure, we're missing programs, but we have reading, writing and math, and that's what people want."

His sentiments were echoed by G.R. Bowers, Ohio's assistant superintendent of public instruction, who said, "Some of the most fundamental progress in education can be made in times of economic crisis. It can't be made at other times because school leaders don't have the clout to cut programs during periods of expansion."

Bowers said many offerings deleted under budget stress are "ancillary programs that were launched as a result of riots and rebellions in the '60's and early '70's, when we made the sorry mistake of trying to provide a curriculum for everyone."

"You could argue that cutting them hurts Johnny or Susie, who's only turned on by a mini-course, but that's hard to measure. Many of the cuts being made involve things the

general public has taken offense at -- courses like 'Death and Dying' -- and if you reduce all of this, you haven't affected basic education at all."

That view is given some weight by the fact that few administrators interviewed cited declines in test scores or other measures of achievement as results of budget cuts, but rather, spoke of program loss or morale problems.

But not everyone agrees with views such as Bowers', and the board rooms of school systems under severe financial pressure are frequently filled with parents who argue that they want more for their children than reading, writing and arithmetic. Unfortunately for such parents, demographic factors have combined to create a voting public increasingly unwilling to support their wishes.

"More and more you hear things like, 'It's not my fault you have a kid -- you pay for it," said John Augenblick, of the Education Commission of the States' Education Finance Center. "That's a perfectly acceptable social stance. It's just different from the one we've had for the past 2,000 years."

Many educators and civil rights leaders charge that such attitudes flourish in cities where the public school population includes increasingly larger percentages of minority group members and poor children. They correctly observe that

some of the cuts commonly made under budget stress affect poor children most.

Decreased library services "are bound to affect children who grow up in families where there's no appreciation for books," said Cleveland school board member Berthina Palmer.

Deletion of elementary school music programs will simply cause affluent parents to send their children to private lessons -- a circumstance which probably means that eight or ten years down the road, high school bands and orchestras will be closed to poorer students.

Although the effects of Proposition 13 on California's schools were diminished this year by bailout money from a large state surplus, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Wilson Riles did order, shortly after the measure's passage, that districts discontinue summer school programs except for handicapped students and graduating seniors.

However, many parents went to other agencies and paid $150 for similar programs or incorporated groups which offered summer school for a fee.

"What about the parents who couldn't afford $150?" Riles said at a meeting of a statewide panel considering the future of government funding. "I am not going to recommend that we forgo summer school next year, because I will not be a party

to a situation where those who have get and those who do not have suffer."

However, given the economic realities of American society, it is obvious that some children are going to suffer because of program cuts, if only because they will be in competition with other children whose parents are able to compensate for the lack by seeing that educational experiences no longer offered in the public schools are obtained elsewhere.

Columbus, Ohio, Superintendent Joseph L. Davis is eloquent on that subject when he contends that students in districts whose voters force program cuts will be handicapped when they must compete with their peers from districts where voters are supportive of school spending.

Davis pointed out that while Columbus voters have not approved new school revenue since 1968, fifteen suburban districts in the same county have passed levies since November of 1976, "and each one did it by capitalizing on our desegregation situation and the idea they might be merged with us if the levy failed."

"How can we stand by when kids, because of levy defeats in cities, are being put at a competitive disadvantage?" Davis said.

Columbus is in the midst of a massive "Choices for the 80's" project, which began with delivery of a report on the

status of the schools to every household in the city. As a result of community hearings and surveys, a list of the most pressing problems confronting the Columbus schools has been prepared along with a list of alternative solutions and their exact cost in property taxes.

"It is true that we are in a desperate financial state and that this is the vehicle we are using to broaden community support for a levy," Davis told a citizens' meeting held in connection with the project. "But we have a broader purpose: to increase the involvement of the entire community with the schools."

The Columbus project is not yet completed, but a similar effort was successful in Highline, Washington, where the school system involved citizens in a series of community meetings "where people were asked to list their priorities for education and then cut the list by one-third," said Administrative Assistant Kenneth L. Calkins. "We had to do it, so we wanted them to participate in the process."

In Detroit, "We keep trying to build an attitude in all our people that our credibility is measured in every tax election," said Freeman A. Flynn, director of the school system's Division of School-Community Relations.

Although the Detroit system has been successful in its last three millage attempts, thus reversing a trend which led to near bankruptcy in 1973, officials continue to analyze

precinct returns from every election. Principals of schools whose voters did not support the increase "are encouraged to improve relations with their communities," Flynn said.

"If we're dependent on the voters, we'd better make damn sure we relate well to them over the long haul."

V

ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

There are more questions than answers concerning the long-range future of public support for education, but certain issues will obviously be crucial.

One of them is the purely demographic question of whether there is enough of a pro-school voting population to permit passage of education taxes in certain communities, particularly cities. Some voter behavior analysts say the answer is no, or will be soon, and this raises the further question of what state and federal governments will do if local systems are simply unable to come up with the revenue they require. One response would be to seek a vast increase in federal funding, as the National Education Association advocates.

Another would be to increase the state's input into education funding, as the State of Washington did following a 1977 court ruling which held that its funding system, heavily reliant on so-called special levies, did not fulfill its constitutional responsibility to make "ample provision" for education.

California's Proposition 13, which reduced local government revenues by about $7 billion and local property

taxes by 57%, had a similar effect on education funding, since the schools were able to open last fall only with the aid of approximately $2.2 billion of a $4.2 billion state bailout package.

The legislature must now confront a long-term plan for school financing, and in its deliberations, will have to consider the state's role in redressing the spending inequities found unconstitutional in the landmark Serrano case. On the surface, that task would appear simple, since the state has, in effect, a state-funded system of education.

Yet even a quick look at the bailout legislation indicates that pre-Proposition 13 inequities existing in local communities are now being perpetuated with state funds, despite the legislation's requirement that high-spending districts cut 15% from the budgets they projected prior to passage of Proposition 13 while low-spending districts had to cut only 9%.

Since those percentages were cut from unequal per-pupil spending, gaps persist. Those gaps are well illustrated in comparisons of expenditures in the Baldwin Park and Beverly Hills unified school districts cited in the original Serrano lawsuit. In 1968-69, Baldwin Park was spending $577 per student, based on a tax rate of $5.48, while Beverly Hills was raising $1,232 per pupil with a tax rate of only $2.38.

By the time Proposition 13 was passed, even various equalizing requirements enacted in California's AB 65 had not eliminated disparities between the two districts, and California Department of Finance figures[1] indicate that projected 1978-79 per-pupil expenditures were $2,861 for Beverly Hills and $1,523 for Baldwin Park.

Nearly all of Beverly Hills' money would have come from property tax, while only about 25% of Baldwin Park's would have depended on that source. Thus California's subsidy for high-spending Beverly Hills ended up being more ($1,528) than that for low-spending Baldwin Park ($1,275). And despite the fact that Beverly Hills had to cut 15% of anticipated spending, as opposed to Baldwin Park's 9%, the high-wealth district's per-pupil expenditure of $2,432 is still much higher than Baldwin Park's $1,386.

"I think it would be safe to say the Serrano attorneys are very watchful," said William Whiteneck, deputy superintendent for administration in California's State Department of Education. "This brings up a whole new equalization question. But it's very expensive to start leveling up, and if you try to level down a Beverly Hills, you won't have a school system, because the people in Beverly

---

[1]As reported in Tax Revolt Digest, Special Report Number 1, published by the California Center for Research and Education in Government, Sacramento, p.5.

Hills can take their property tax savings and income and go to a private school to get what they would no longer have in the public system."

To discuss Serrano and its post-Proposition 13 implications is to raise a broader question of spending equity. If it is unfair for a child's education to depend on the property wealth of the district in which he lives, is it equally unfair for it to depend on the willingness of voters in his community to support education taxes at the polls? Since even total fiscal neutrality can be negated in a state where voter whim can mean the difference between adequate and inadequate funding, should voters be allowed to determine the level of spending for children in their districts?

Not only do districts with high levels of community conflict surrounding issues such as desegregation have difficulty passing school levies, but there is also some evidence to suggest that the level of family income within a district may affect the outcome of its school tax elections.

Carla Edlefson, of the Citizens Council for Ohio Schools' finance project, analyzed the outcome of school levy elections on the November 1978 ballot and discovered a difference of $1,019 separating average family income in districts where levies failed from that in districts where the measures passed. Ms. Edlefson acknowledged that many other factors affect levy outcome, and she concluded:

> This relatively unsophisticated analysis should of course not to be interpreted to mean income-poor districts can't pass levies and income-rich districts always do. It does suggest, however, that our present system of state aid to schools is unfair in that it rewards effort without taking into consideration that the same millage may require greater effort in an income-poor district than in an income-rich district. Are we cheating the children of the poor because their parents and neighbors feel less able to support high levels of expenditures for schools?[1]

One might add the question of whether children are being cheated as well because their parents and neighbors feel angry about desegregation or teacher strikes or a host of other issues.

Since school finance litigation is still grappling with the issue of how to achieve fiscal neutrality, answers to such questions may be a long way off, but at some point, it is likely they will have to be attempted.

Other issues educators confront as a result of declining financial support include:

---

[1]School Finance Fact Sheet No.6, November 15, 1978, Citizens Council for Ohio Schools, Columbus, p.2.

- Increased public scrutiny of school management practices.

  "We're finding more and more fiscal specialists becoming chief school administrators," said Russell A. North, supervisor in school business management for New York's state education department. New York offers voluntary management analysis to its school districts, and Ohio requires top local administrators to participate in annual state-run workshops on school management.

- Aging faculties, with little opportunity to hire teachers fresh from college.

  Administrators say this results in higher costs, since salaries increase with longevity in the district, and in the danger of losing innovation.

- Potential loss of local control as state legislators move to regulate the ways in which increased shares of state funds may be spent.

  While local systems in financial distress welcome the bailout money which permits them to stay in business, they say it inevitably comes with strings attached. In California, where the state has assumed about 70% of education

funding, fears that local control will be lost are expressed as frequently as fears for job security.

In Ohio, where the Cleveland and Columbus school systems remain open only because of borrowing from an emergency state loan fund, such fears have been realized. The Columbus school board was forced, as a condition of the loan, to drop out of a lawsuit challenging the fund's provisions, and both systems were required to cut programs identified by the state as exceeding minimum requirements.

"We're pursuing a course in which minimums tend to become maximums for districts in trouble," said Robert Barrow, the Columbus schools' budget analyst.

One of the major political battles in the next few years is likely to be between citizens who consider that situation appalling and those who believe it's the way things should have been all along.

FORD FELLOWS IN EDUCATIONAL JOURNALISM: A DESCRIPTION

This report is based upon work done for the 1978 Ford Fellows in Educational Journalism Program. Each year the Fellowship offers a selected group of educational journalists a three-month Fellowship program designed to strengthen the educational media by providing additional resources to working reporters and their news organizations.

The Fellowship is a unique opportunity for educational journalists to go beyond the local news of school board votes and teachers' strikes to undertake a comprehensive study of an issue of major significance to the schools and the society they serve. It is an individually tailored program in which journalists select topics of concern to them and their public, to explore through site visits to relevant programs throughout the country, meetings with national experts and authorities, and exposure to current research and background literature. Individual study plans are supplemented by monthly Fellowship seminars that focus on educational issues of interest to the Journalism Fellows and provide time to share and discuss study experiences. In addition to stories based upon the Fellowship, which journalists may choose to do for their news organizations, the program publishes a monograph of Fellowship reports and articles.

Initiated by The Ford Foundation's Advisor on Communications, Fred W. Friendly (formerly of CBS News), and its Vice President for Education, Harold Howe II (former U.S. Commissioner of Education), the Fellowship is a novel, experiential approach to strengthening the educational media. By providing journalists with time and resources for study and travel, the Fellowship seeks to:

*encourage the development of a knowledgeable and effective educational press, equipped to bring both analytical depth and national context to local news coverage;

*provide experienced journalists with an opportunity to conduct a thorough analysis of an issue which will help to clarify and answer some of the questions facing the country's $165 billion education industry.

The Fellowship is coordinated by the George Washington University's Institute for Educational Leadership. IEL program administrators are available to assist Journalism Fellows in designing and conducting their individual study programs and arrange for monthly Fellowship Seminars.

Family Impact Seminar: An Introduction

This booklet describes the origins and purposes of the Seminar, and briefly summarizes its progress to date and plans for the future. (October 1977)

.....first copy no charge
.....additional copies 50¢ each

Towards an Inventory of Federal Programs with Direct Impact on Families

This staff report discusses the scope, depth and breadth of the federal programs affecting families. It lists and reviews our inventory of 264 programs selected from the 1976 Federal Catalog of Domestic Assistance that are considered to have direct impact on families.

.....$3.00

Interim Report of the Family Impact Seminar

This monograph shares in some detail the Seminar's initial conclusions with regard to working definitions, preliminary findings, and values relevant to family impact analysis. A second section includes two staff conceptual papers; one outlines an initial checklist of questions to be asked by those attempting family impact analysis; the other shares our approach to data. The third section outlines the focus and plans of the Seminar's two case studies -- on foster care and government as employer -- which are the basis for two of our three pilot family impact statements. An appendix includes a selected list of academic research centers which focus on public policy and families, a selected bibliography, a list of federal and state contacts who are interested in family impact, and key data sources.

.....$4.00

The following working papers are available on a limited basis:

Toward Family Impact Analyses: Some First Steps by A. Sidney Johnson, III; presented to the "Kin and Communities: The Peopling of America" education program of the Smithsonian Institution, June 15, 1976.

Family Perspective on Mental Health by Theodora Ooms; prepared as a background paper for a meeting with the staff of the President's Commission on Mental Health, June 24, 1977.

Families as Educators by Wilbur J. Cohen, A. Sidney Johnson, III, and Theodora Ooms; presented to the annual Institute of Chief State School Officers in Michigan, July 29, 1977.

Available from: Publications Coordinator, Institute for Educational Leadership, Suite 310, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036 Send check or purchase order payable to George Washington University.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Education Times

A national weekly newspaper serving education leaders with broad coverage of education policy issues. *Education Times* is published weekly except for the last two weeks of August and the last two weeks of December. Subscription rate is $30 per year (48 issues) if check accompanies order, or $32 per year if billing is requested.

IEL POLICY PAPERS

1. **Perspectives on Federal Educational Policy: An Informal Colloquium**
   An examination of the forms and mechanics of federal policy processes, by Robert Andringa, Chester E. Finn Jr., Samuel Halperin, Michael Timpane, Thomas Wolanin. August 1976 ..... $1.50

2. **Federalism at the Crossroads: Improving Educational Policymaking**
   An anthology of critiques and prescriptions for strengthening the intergovernmental system in education. December 1976 ..... $3.00

3. **Education Policy and The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)**
   A Report of Regional Policy Conferences, by Bruce Boston. August 1977 ..... $2.50

4. **Language, Ethnicity, and the Schools: Policy Alternatives for Bilingual-Bicultural Education**
   An analysis of the federal role in bilingual-bicultural education, by Noel Epstein. August 1977 ..... $4.00

5. **Educational Policy in the Carter Years**
   Experts analyze the decisionmaking process in Washington and the Carter Administration's performance and future prospects, by Christopher Cross, William Blakey, Samuel Halperin, Gregory Humphrey, John Jennings, George Kaplan, Alan McCunnett, Jr., Michael O'Keefe, Charles Saunders, Jr., September 1978 ..... $4.00

6. **Needed: A New Federal Policy for Higher Education**
   Analysis and recommendations for federal directions in higher education, by Joseph Froomkin. September 1978 ..... $4.00

7. **Grants Consolidation: A New Balance in Federal Aid to Schools?**
   Anthology of articles analyzing the degree of control that should accompany federal money. Pro and con positions on carefully regulated categorical grants *vs.* broadly defined block grants. Philip Kearney, editor, August 1979 ..... $4.50

8. **In the Eye of the Storm: Proposition 13 and Public Education in California**
   A comprehensive picture of what happened in California as a result of Proposition 13 and an assessment of what the experience holds for others. by Don F. Speich and Stephen S. Weiner. May 1980 ..... $4.50

9. **State Leadership in Education: On Being a Chief State School Officer**
   Excerpts of conversations with former chief state school officers Nyquist, Nix, Cosberg and Pittenger that offer an insiders account of the state education policy process and what it takes to be a chief. Jerome T. Murphy, editor. May 1980 ..... $4.50

JOURNALISM FELLOWS' REPORTS (1979-1980):

10. **The Journalism Research Fellows Report: What Makes an Effective School?**
    Based on three months of state and national Fellowship study, seven selected education reporters write about what they found was effective in urban, rural and suburban schools nationally and in six states. Diane Brundage, editor. April 1980 ..... $5.00

11. **The Ford Fellows in Educational Journalism Report:**
    Compilation of major news series based on three months of national research by leading education journalists. Diane Brundage, editor. December 1979 ..... $4.00

12. **Growing Up Gifted in America's Schools**
    by Hunty Collins, *The Oregonian* $2.50

13. **Minimum Competency Testing: State Approaches**
    by Jimmie Covington, *The Commercial Appeal* $2.50

14. **Indian Education: An Examination of Issues**
    by Gary Fife, *United Indian Planners News* $2.50

15. **Competency Based Education: An Overview and Seven Case Studies**
    by Robert Fralon, *The Racine Journal Times* $2.50

16. **Perspectives on Parent Participation in the Schools**
    by Diane Granat, *The Chicago Daily Herald* $2.50

17. **Achieving Quality Education: A Parent's Guide**
    by Rick Janka, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* $2.50

18. **School Finance Patterns in the South**
    by Linda Williams, *The South Mississippi Sun* $2.50

19. **Education and the Voter: School Spending at the Polls**
    by Saundra Ivey, *The Tennessean* $2.50

20. Black Colleges: Roots, Rewards, Renewal
by Ethel Payne, *The St. Louis Sentinel* $2.50

21. Declining Enrollments: Studies of Selected Cities
by Monte Trammer, *The Baltimore Sun* $2.50

22. Indochinese Refugees: A National Picture of the Education America Gives Their Children
by Mark Lilly, *The New York Daily News* $2.50

23. Education in High Growth Areas: A Portrait of the Schools in Energy Boom Towns of the West
by John Cummins, *The Salt Lake Tribune* $2.50

24. The Push for Excellence: A National Portrait of Education's Exxel Programs
by Charles Hardy, *The Charlotte Observer* $2.50

25. The Effect of Enrollment Decline on Public Secondary Schools
by Christine Dunphy, *The Worcester Evening Gazette* $2.50

26. Health Education in the Public Schools: A National Study
by Wista Johnson, *New York Amsterdam News* $2.50

27. Twenty-Five Years Since Brown: Indicators of Desegregation and Equal Education Opportunity
Synthesis of data on the country's desegregation record. May 1979.
by Gwendolyn Mikell Renny and Bert Mogin $2.00

WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

28. Taking Sexism Out of Education
by IEL's Project on Women in Education.
August 1978 ..... No charge for single copy (send $.50 for postage)

29. Hierarchy, Power and Women in Educational Policymaking
Guide to the politics of career advancement $2.50

30. Women in Educational Leadership: An Open Letter to State Legislators
State laws, certification, and other structural barriers to women in educational policymaking $2.50

31. Handbook on How to End Sexism in Your Schools
State action plans that can be developed to move women into educational policymaking $3.00

LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMS AND POLICIES:

32. Lifelong Learning and the U.S. Congress, 1977-78
An insider's analysis of the actions of the 95th Congress and their implications for lifelong learning as national policy, by Ellen Hoffman, April 1979 ..... $2.50

33. Report of the PECA Task Force on Lifelong Learning
Lifelong learning opportunities in the noninstitutional, voluntary sector of society. February 1977 ..... $3.00

EDUCATION FOR THE HANDICAPPED:

34. Minimum Competency Testing Programs and Handicapped Students: Perspectives on Policy and Practice
Analysis of the issues involved in implementing competency testing programs that will be consistent with P.L. 94-142 and Section 504, by Anne Rosewater. June 1979 ..... $2.50

35. Education of Handicapped Children in Rural Areas
by Judy Schrag, Lucretia Farago and Lisa Walker. May 1979 ..... No charge for single copy (send $.50 for postage)

PUBLIC POLICY AND FAMILIES:

36. Toward an Inventory of Federal Programs with Direct Impact on Families
Family Impact Seminar. February 1978 ..... $3.00

37. Interim Report of the Family Impact Seminar
Family Impact Seminar. June. 1978 ..... $4.00

38. Teenage Pregnancy and Family Impact: New Perspectives on Policy
Family Impact Seminar. June 1979 ..... $3.50

39. FIS Conference on Teenage Pregnancy
Family Impact Seminar. 1979. Complete set of nine background papers by Butts, Forbush, Fox, Furstenberg, Jones & Placek, Martinez, Moore, Scales, Steinfels $12.00

TO ORDER PUBLICATIONS

Send Payment or Purchase Order to:

Publications Coordinator
Institute for Educational Leadership
Suite 310, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

There is a ten percent discount for orders of ten copies or more of a single volume. Add $1.00 if first class postage is desired. Make all checks payable to The George Washington University.